

The protection of endangered species has become increasingly relevant in our country and around the world in the past century. In the early 1970's, Congress passed the Endangered Species Act to protect plant and animal life from reaching the brinks of extinction. This act has been further developed and amended since its original enactment to protect and preserve more species and the habitats they depend on.

To date, the Endangered Species Act has shown great progress and results. Almost fifty species have been recovered and delisted, while twenty-three other species have been reclassified from endangered to threatened. According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Endangered Species Act has saved more than ninety-nine percent of its listed species from extinction.

Endangered Species Day was created in 2006 to recognize the national conservation effort to protect our nation's endangered species and their habitats. Local zoos, schools, libraries, museums and community organizations around the country have taken the opportunity to host educational activities and events to generate awareness about the importance of protecting endangered species worldwide.

In spite of these successes, we are still losing species at alarming rates. Worldwide, more than 16,000 species are threatened with extinction. Up to one-third of U.S. species are at increased risk of extinction, and more than 1,300 U.S. plants and animals have already been federally listed as threatened or endangered, and protected under the Endangered Species Act.

As a Floridian, I am particularly concerned about endangered species in the Everglades. Florida has the third highest number of endangered species in the nation. Of the 108 species listed under the Endangered Species Act throughout Florida, sixty five of them are located in the Everglades. If we do not act fast, we may lose some of our most incredible species, such as the Florida Panther, the Woodrat and the Manatee.

It is crucial to protect the diversity of our planet's species and educate ourselves about the issues and challenges affecting these species and their habitats. Wildlife conservation must continue to be one of our top priorities.